



Fernando Solanas: An Interview

Fernando Solanas; James Roy MacBean

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thoroughness, such courage, and such conviction, the viewer finds it difficult to hazard an appraisal of its aesthetic merits—especially when the film's aesthetic and political merits are so inextricably intertwined. Suffice it to say that if Solanas and Getino, in seeking the proper form for each individual cell of the film, intended each of the major divisions (and major subdivisions) to be capable of standing alone, then they did not fully succeed, for it is doubtful if any of the film's basic parts could be considered wholly satisfactory on their own. (And, in fact, when for one reason or another only the first section has been shown, critics in Europe

have acknowledged that in spite of its insights this section is a bit too flashy to be considered anything more than a brilliant but inconclusive *tour de force*.) But this is not a major flaw, for *La Hora de los Hornos* is not made to be seen in separate pieces. In fact, the greatest strength of the film is precisely in the juxtaposition of so many different styles and so many different types of material. Placed side by side, they give us an idea and a feeling of the complexity of the situation in contemporary Argentina. And this is an excellent starting-point—both for making the revolution and for making revolutionary cinema.

Fernando Solanas: An Interview

Can you tell us something about the conditions under which you made your film: time, material means, financial means, personnel, etc.?

Since our goal was to create a cinema not conditioned by the system, a free cinema, a decolonized cinema, a class cinema, a militant cinema involved ideologically and politically in and for the revolution, we had to provide for ourselves the economic resources, the means of production that would permit us to make a film just as freely as a writer producing an ideological essay. With the major difference that a writer, when he writes, doesn't have to lay out much money, whereas the film-maker is profoundly tied to the economic conditions of his work.

Consequently, one of the greatest problems we had to overcome was that of the production of the film, and, at the same time, that of making a revolutionary film in a non-revolutionary country whose system is neo-colonialist, capitalist, and bourgeois. Our case is actually quite rare in the history of cinema. It's perhaps the

first time, in fact, that one actually attempts to create a revolutionary cinema *with* and *about* the forces of liberation—and in a country that has been neocolonialized. A subversive film made clandestinely.

In these conditions, we had to limit ourselves to whatever economic means we could muster up ourselves. In fact, we made the film little by little as money came in from the other film work each of us was doing. We worked on making commercials—right in the heart of the commercial-industrial system. That work enabled us to obtain the money to make our revolutionary film—and also to gain valuable technical experience. So the solution we found was to make a few commercials in order to be able to make *another cinema*.

Nonetheless, our possibilities remained fairly weak, as a break occurred pretty quickly, a break with all the notions of capitalist production we had been subservient to up till then. To create a free cinema presupposes that one bring about a revolution in production itself: in other words, that one make "a cinema of film-makers." Even the notion of film-maker as "author" isn't enough, because it gets bogged down in

the capitalist system, where a "director" is one who gives orders to others, a "boss."

So we were obliged to learn for ourselves all the different aspects of film production, to learn how to handle all the difficulties involved in making a film. I'm convinced, as a result of this work, that the possibility of making a new cinema completely outside the system depends on whether or not film-makers can transform themselves from "directors" into a sort of *total film-maker*.

And no one can become a *total film-maker* without being a film technician, without being capable of handling the production and handling as well any of the technical problems involved in production. I don't really assert this as an absolute principle, no; it depends on circumstances. In our case, there were three or four of us who were able to handle things. Octavio Getino and I had to be able to do all sorts of things, and fast, as we were obliged to work on two films—two different types of cinema—during the same day. And 24 hours often wasn't enough.

But these limitations, on the other hand, offered some very great advantages: a wonderful experience of decolonization and of total liberation at every level. So much so that we named our production unit "Cine-Liberación," not so much in the sense of a political liberation, but first of all in the sense of a total liberation of the film-maker, of the film-"author" who writes with his camera without being conditioned by the economic and technical artistic integrity just as much as a writer does confronting a sheet of paper or a painter confronting his canvas.

Of course it's true that in the European cinema, the majority of film-makers are considered as *authors*, since the cinema, in Europe, occupies a considerable place in the domain of culture. But when they are making their film, they are *conditioned* by the industrial exploitation of cinema in the capitalist world, and their narrative and thematic possibilities remain confined within the limits of the system. I refrain from saying "ideological limits" because I suppose that the exercise of "bourgeois democratic

freedoms" is real; but in this case it's the majority of the people who constitute the limitation. It's the middle classes who consume that type of ideology that is petit-bourgeois or bourgeois, definitely right-wing. And in capitalist countries, it's consuming which makes the rules.

Therefore, even if the film-maker isn't conditioned by overt political censorship, he's conditioned by the consuming habits of the majority, of the middle classes who consume sex, violence, and art. And this produces a cinema that is alienated and alienating, a cinema of the needs and insufficiencies of man, one forged in a society where the individual is king, a cinema which develops and perpetuates the neuroses of—and in—an alienated society, neocapitalist society. So the man they call an "author" is actually conditioned at every stage of his work.

What we want is to create an independent cinema: we call it "*The Third Cinema*." Why? It's neither a commercial cinema nor a "cinéma d'auteur" with all sorts of cultural intentions, conditioned by the consumer society and its political and economic structures. It's a cinema that is created within all the limitations and all the possibilities inherent in a setting loose of the revolutionary forces. We thus have the opportunity of creating with our own resources a nonconditioned cinema. We have to carve out a new path, as there hasn't been much done in this area, but the newness of this experience is one of its great strengths.

Then, too, improvements in the technology of cinema have helped to demystify that technology. Today there are some extraordinary cameras, very light-weight. And a certain type of cinema really costs very little. The experiment we threw ourselves into was really that of a cinema made with absolutely nothing. With just the little bit of money we could make day to day, we were able to make *La Hora de los Hornos*—utilizing almost exclusively a 16mm Bolex without sync-sound. After the shooting, we had to spend a lot of time post-synchronizing the interviews and commentaries. But today there are 16mm cameras with auto-

matic diaphragms, lightmeters, sync sound; and it's child's play to do some filming. This is so important if a man is going to be able to think in terms of cinema, to think with a camera. It's absolutely necessary to demystify the difficulties of production.

[. . .]

Instead of making a cinema of fiction, which is very exciting for the personal satisfaction of the author, who filters the external world through his subjectivity, his fantasies, we tried to make a *cinema of ideological essay* which is based in the concrete reality.

Do you think there can exist such a thing as revolutionary cinema of fiction?

I would answer: *yes*, obviously. Because the problem of the opposition *document/fiction* is a function of what we are trying to *express*, of the objectives we are seeking in the film.

The cinema of Eisenstein, for example, is a cinema of fiction, it re-creates; it's not documentary material shot at the time of the events depicted. *Strike* and *Potemkin* are not documentaries.

In our film, we have re-created some of the situations. A lot of the sequences which seem to be documentary are in fact re-created, *mises en scènes*; for it's just not possible to be on the spot all the time, at the right time, to capture the violence of a situation. Unless it happens that one is there more or less by chance, at a confrontation, when the repression occurs.

So to answer your question about a revolutionary cinema of fiction: *yes*, if we use this term to designate a film-document that re-creates reality. *No*, if this term means a cinema of fictional characters and thus forms a tie with old literary forms such as the novel or short-story. The danger inherent in this type of cinema—and the reason it must be avoided—is demonstrated by the fact that by far the majority of European “films d’auteurs” have failed to develop any revolutionary ideology.

In reality, the problem is not to know whether one will construct a total fiction or not, but rather to know just *what* we want to express and what we can express by the means of total

fiction. For the majority of themes we have inherited are themes that come from the European cinema and are related to the crisis of the bourgeoisie, to the decadence of the bourgeoisie, to the consumer-society, to the impossibility of communication, in short to the psychological problems of the middle classes of the highly developed countries. One doesn't find in the European cinema the problem of revolutionary masses or the challenging of the system. It is impossible to find films that are not made with the eminently characteristic language and technique of bourgeois culture.

For example, if I wanted to make a film here in France, one that would be a sort of reportage and at the same time a fiction film on what happened here in May 1968, a film about the reasons why the movement failed to sustain itself, I would use as a starting point the situation of a young worker or student who took part in the movement, and, of course, starting with one character a whole world can be revealed. But the main difficulty with this sort of fiction cinema, or plot-cinema, is that it always (or nearly always) ends up with a subject matter which is not revolution, but rather the decadence of the dominant classes, and it has its foundations in the techniques, the culture, the language, and the forms of the bourgeoisie. The European “cinéma d’auteur,” even if it proclaims itself revolutionary or sympathetic to the progressive forces of liberation—which may, of course, be true at the level of individual sincerity—nevertheless falls back upon the language and the technique of the dominant classes. This borrowing from the expressive tradition of the enemy is demonstrated by the subtlety of the way language is used.

It could happen that Europe might develop a cinema that would be capable of criticizing the forms of expression of the enemy, a cinema that would take over for its own uses the resources of expression of the progressive classes. But the efforts in this direction are always short-circuited by the presence of the “aesthetic”; because it's at this level that irrationality persists and that the continuation of notions of beauty, art, and purity crop up once again;

and it's also here that mystification occurs—that falsifying of the real world which is so useful to the dominant classes of capitalist society in maintaining their dominant position. Walk or drive along one of the beautiful boulevards of Paris, look at the store-windows, the elegance of the displays, read any of the fashion magazines, take a look at the way people in the street are dressed, all of this will help you to understand the aesthetic forms by which a fully developed capitalist society imposes its domination upon us. We are not only subjected to the machine-gun fire of advertising, but also to that of the *beautiful*, of the *admirable*, of the *eternal*, of the *sublime*, of the *good*—all of which tends to bring us back to a position of *nonviolence*, of *non-conflict*.

The aesthetics of the bourgeoisie which is reflected in the department stores and the magazines, appears as well throughout the whole western cinema. In other words, the "auteur cinema" is perfectly capable of satisfying the needs and wishes of the consumer-society. Therefore, the author, even if subjectively he is a revolutionary, continues to create works which are objectively bourgeois.

His efforts are short-circuited. He wants to criticize the bourgeoisie but he remains essentially bourgeois in his aesthetic position, in his very conception of things. If a left-wing "author" criticizes the bourgeoisie, the bourgeoisie still is able to recognize itself in the author, and it exclaims: "Oh it's so beautiful! This Italian film is so beautiful!" Ultimately, everything reduces to the following: Mister Such-and-Such has ideas which are the opposite of my own, but Mister Such-and-Such expresses himself so beautifully with my language! In the end, we get along quite well together, because Mister Such-and-Such, while he turns the ideas around, doesn't change his means of expression, nor his subjectivity, nor his irrationality. He continues to express himself in a style and a world-view that belong to the bourgeois consumer-society. He can easily be co-opted.

In this type of cinema one often finds a sensualism that is downright alienating. To put it briefly, if there doesn't exist a revolutionary

fiction cinema, it's not because such a thing is fundamentally impossible, but because the cinema remains tied to capitalist exploitation. So one turns out films which are "beautiful," films which will please the public. This is the way things are because this is what satisfies the tastes and the ideologies inculcated by the dominant classes. It's a vicious circle. But where Latin America is concerned, I think one could make a revolutionary cinema using any of the different genres, whether related to the novel, the short story, or the ideological essay; but what is essential is that the guy who's going to make this film must ask himself the following questions before he starts out to work on the film: why am I making this film, for whom and with whom, from what point of view? And he must do this, not in the name of some sacrosanct universality of culture, but in relation to the ideological interests of a particular class of society—and of which class?

What is important, when a cinema becomes ideologically radicalized and begins to concern itself with revolutionary subject matter, is that it must have a revolutionary content which fits in with its historical mission. The fact that today, in French cinema, one talks about nothing but love—even if one goes quite far—this illustrates the profoundly reactionary attitude that exists. For all during this time, one is not talking about precisely what one should be talking about—the revolutionary movement. This amounts to a way of fooling the spectator and of censoring oneself.

If the author of a film treats some of the great contemporary problems from a revolutionary point of view, that is, from the viewpoint of the revolutionary masses, then the content and the ideology of his film are just, are correct. He makes a film which transmits an experience in terms of class. And culture is a class phenomenon.

The problem of form is therefore inseparable from that of content. Make a film on a strike (or, if you absolutely insist, on the impossibility of loving one another in a capitalist society), logically, if you don't destroy the old notions of beauty on which all bourgeois art rests,

your film ends up as another case of alienated expression, completely short-circuited, tamed like a wild animal kept in a cage. The cage, the chain around your neck—it's nothing other than "beautiful expression."

But take Cuban films—Cuba is a revolutionary country, after all!—they're not revolutionary, with hardly an exception. They remain prisoners of the Hollywood or Moscow forms. While Fidel Castro has succeeded in liberating the country from the Yankees and from the neo-Stalinist influence, Cuban cinema continues to express itself in the forms of bourgeois culture. What do you think of this?

One isn't able to change one's form of expression or one's ideology the way one changes his shirt. The taking of political power in a revolutionary process is a very important qualitative leap forward. But since various structures of production continue to co-exist, the changes can't all be made in 24 hours. In other terms, the process which leads to a socialist or communist society, which process of transformation must start with the taking of political power, doesn't by any means complete itself within 24 hours. And it's all the more difficult to change sentiments and habits of expression of a man who has lived his whole life during a period of colonialism. The fact that a whole people can move from illiteracy to literacy is already a giant step forward. But the transformation of man into a new man is more complex and is going to take longer. And it necessitates a much more profound struggle than the one which transforms the economic production of a society. The problem is that all the subjectivity, all the vital experience of a man who grew up in a capitalist context is alienated. Consequently, his psychology and his language are alienated as well. He hasn't yet made his real entrance into History.

The revolutionary process in the colonized or neocolonized countries of the Third World is difficult, because the problem is for them to make their entrance into History. The revolution itself—the taking of political power—doesn't make much change in the population, in its habits, in its customs, in its psychology.

But the taking of power by revolution gives these people a revolutionary political consciousness. At the level of knowledge, what changes first is *the knowledge of the external world*, and it's through this that *one recognizes who one's enemies are* and the necessity of the revolution. But one's private life and one's subjectivity are much harder to change.

Let's understand this carefully: the only way to change man and his culture, is to get on with the task of changing the distribution of political power. But in those countries where the revolution has already come on the scene, there still exist a considerable number of social groups which hold onto a religious sort of mentality they've inherited from tradition. The rôle of the revolutionary avant-garde is to penetrate into the mass-culture, but many of those masses are difficult to awaken. If a liberated country maintains itself on a revolutionary path, then it's the generations who have been educated in this new world who are going to find the new language, the new forms of expression that are appropriate for the new man.

In *La Hora de los Hornos*, I see that having been formed under neocolonialism, I can't reach a stage of really deep ideological understanding unless I succeed in transforming myself; if not I run the risk of operating with models I learned under the oppressors. The most difficult thing is surely to attain a liberated personal expression. And that's one thing that will never be obtained by legislative decree. Not even with the good will of Fidel or of any other revolutionary in the world, people are not going to transform themselves when given the order. Even once the revolution will have taken power, there will be a time when different forms of culture will co-exist. In the cinema, as in Cuba, the cultural influences persist, up until the time when new forms, a new culture, are developed—and this is especially true of a country which never had a strong national culture of its own. Because in the neocolonized countries of the Third World, not even the bourgeois culture is national; it was imported by the oppressor. So much so that the Argentine cinema, for example, is impregnated

with the baroque world view of a foreign culture. At the same time that they colonized us, the countries of Europe brought us their ideologies. Our bourgeoisie is educated in the big cities of the Continent and returns to Latin America with models of art which are then presented to us as both indigenous and universal, but which in fact are European, bourgeois, and capitalist. When a painter in France or a French film-maker immerse themselves in their own personal creative intuition, they express themselves in French, their art is French. It may be bourgeois, or it may not be, but that's not the issue for the moment. But in a colonized country with a colonized culture, the artist has to make a double effort: to try to get beyond alienated expression (alienated by the fact that the culture itself is alien), and try to discover new bases of departure that will be indigenous and national.

But then, too, just like the European film-maker who wants to radically oppose the system, he has to rid himself of the bourgeois language, of bourgeois aesthetic attitudes. In fact, what it really boils down to is placing oneself in the realm of the "ugly" in opposition to the realm of the "beautiful." In opposition to an aesthetics, one has got to set up an *anti-aesthetics*: I don't necessarily mean of ugliness, but rather of that which, according to bourgeois notions of aesthetics, could not be considered beautiful. To be an artist means, in this case, to proceed from the anti-aesthetics of the forms one utilizes and to find the corresponding new language, new expression.

What revolutionary film-makers in the Third World (and elsewhere) have to do, is to rid themselves of all Culture, of all Art. I see too many Mona Lisas, too many museums, too many temples. Culture is so powerful that it is now being distributed in every product of the consumer society. It doesn't make much difference if we have political disagreements with the enemy, when all along we get on so well together when it comes to aesthetics and culture. And this way the enemy co-opts everything we are able to say. That's why we, from

Argentina, trying to create a new cinema, a cinema of poetry and polemical essay, call for *works in progress*, for unfinished works of art, for imperfect works of art. It's no longer the time for artists to create perfectly finished and polished works of art. We are at a moment in History where one no longer can spend years and years sculpting a statue or building a column or painting a delicate portrait. We are constantly assailed by all the information media that are controlled by the system. We are literally victims of aggression.

Instead of finished works of art, we are seeking a *praxis*. Our courage consists in confronting the unknown, in rethinking all our aesthetic and ideological hypotheses. We are thrown back on our heels and forced to create, to invent. Because whatever is not radically different from the system doesn't give the system any trouble; it's nothing but the same language speaking basically the same words. Therefore, our courage has got to consist in creating something entirely different, a new aesthetics. And even if a film-maker's attempts don't reach a pinnacle of success, they still lay the foundations for his successors to follow. In a way, success may have to be renounced. Because at the heart of each one of us, due to our individualism, there undoubtedly exists the desire to create an individual masterpiece: one wants nothing less than to be another Leonardo or Dante; but if we spend our time trying to achieve this, we are betraying our primary, communal program of action. While we spend our time trying to leave our personal imprint on the world, there's a merciless battle taking place, in which there are deaths at every instant. Under these conditions, working alone as an artist means that much time lost in the struggle against the forces that oppress us. This kind of complicity by abstention is a serious political error.

So it's high time we started building cinematographic cathedrals, anonymous works of art like the gothic cathedrals whose architects and sculptors left no signatures behind them. We have to renounce ambition, personal glory,

prestige, status, beauty, youthful innocence. We have to accept the limitations imposed on us by the historical process of the liberation of man. We should think in terms of the limitations imposed on a Vietnamese man—men—

aced by napalm, with little time and little space in which to live. And nothing shall bring us back in line with the aesthetics of the past!

[Translated by James Roy MacBean]

Reviews

WOMEN IN LOVE

Director: Ken Russell. Script: Larry Kramer, based on the novel by D. H. Lawrence. Photography: Billy Williams. United Artists.

Over the past ten or so years, there's begun to be a change in the caliber of the people writing for the English-speaking screen. Movies have become respectable, academic even, and the people who work on them aren't the breezy illiterates who used to be in charge. Educated—and more often, semi-educated—people are now the controlling and the creative forces in filmmaking, and they've brought a fair number of changes along with them. There was a time when all that anybody who cared about films worried about when a great book was turned into a movie was whether the movie-makers would have any idea as to what the book in question was about. For a long time, mangled adaptations were one of the mainstays of the film market; they never seemed to go out of style. Books were denatured right and left, their themes twisted up so badly that they sometimes came out as symmetrical opposites of the authors' original views. Hollywood's literary community wasn't exactly the Bloomsbury Group, and neither, for that matter, was the coterie of scriptwriters that used to supervise many of the British-made instant classics. The roster of subverted literary masterpieces is a mockingly familiar one; it should hardly require another look. Everyone knows how, thirty years ago, *Wuthering Heights* was turned into a story about the evils of class discrimination, without even the meagerest hint of a love that was too hot and too powerful to be housed by the universe. And how *The Great Gatsby*, a

decade later, became an indictment of high living—nobody involved with it seeming at all aware of the idea of a country that had forgotten its roots. And how, in the fifties, it was the same thing, as the themes of writers from Tolstoy to Faulkner were passed by almost reflexively and replaced by ignorant platitudes, some of them unconsciously funny.

But now the question that comes to mind when a great book is taken to the screen isn't so much "Will they understand it?" as it is "Will they be able to do it?" It's a reasonably sure bet today that the sorts of people who turn important works of fiction into movies will be familiar with their sources. Usually, they've read all the famous criticism and boned up on the author's life, and right before their film goes into production, they can usually be found telling reporters from *Life* magazine how much they love the original, that when they first read it in college they went wild over it, that it's the story of their lives, the key to the twentieth century, and the greatest novel ever written. Very often, the upshot of it all is an awkwardly cryptic movie like *Dr. Zhivago* or *Ulysses*. Or one like *Women in Love*.

The people who made *Women in Love* know what they want to do, but they don't know how to do it—and what they want to do might be impossible. Larry Kramer, who wrote the movie's screenplay, and Ken Russell, who directed, are obviously conscious of all the big themes in the D. H. Lawrence novel. They know enough, for example, not to try to turn the book's four main characters into long-faced twenties equivalents of Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice. The usual gibberish about Lawrence as the mahomet of the sexual revo-